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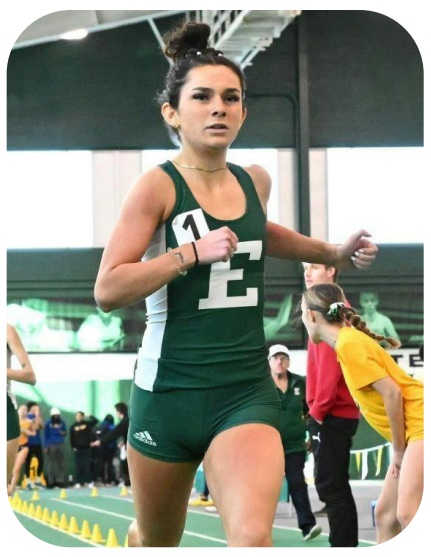
The Eastern Echo

MONDAY, MARCH 4, 2024 | VOLUME 140, ISSUE 08 ● SERVING EMU AND YPSILANTI SINCE 1881

GALLERY: Around the Community - ***pg. 2***



SPORTS: Paige Marchant becomes MAC royalty - ***pg. 3***

REVIEWS: 'Avatar: The Last Airbender' is a lazy rehash of a beloved cartoon - ***pg. 4***

EMU's College of Health and Human Services enrollment decline highest in the University

AARON HUGHES
MANAGING EDITOR

According to Eastern's data files, the College of Health and Human Services' (CHHS) undergraduate head count has seen a 41.09% decrease in students from 2019 to 2023. This is the largest decrease in that span from all of the colleges, the closest being the College of Business with a loss of 27.33%.

Currently, the CHHS counted 2,040 students in the fall semester of 2023, the lowest it's been in over a decade. The last time the college's numbers were that low was in the fall of 2007 when the University had 2,365 undergraduate students in the CHHS.

Before the beginning of the fall 2023 semester, the University named Jennifer Kellman-Fritz as the new dean of the CHHS. Previously serving as the interim dean for former Dean Murali Nair who retired in January of 2023, Kellman-Fritz said she was already aware of the situation when she took her role as dean.

"Upon accepting the position, I was well aware of the challenges confronting the college. Having dedicated over two decades to EMU and CHHS, my commitment is unwavering. It is my intention to foster engagement among students, faculty, and the community as we collectively focus on making our college as strong as it ever was," Kellman-Fritz said in a statement.

Though aware of the problem, Kellman-Fritz viewed the decline in enrollment as an issue the University is facing as a whole, not just the CHHS.

"The issue of declining enrollment is not exclusive to CHHS; it has been a widespread concern exacerbated by the pandemic-induced departure of essential workers, many who are now returning to school. In response, we are actively pursuing various initiatives focused on recruitment and retention, with amazing support from the Provost's Office for our efforts," Kellman-Fritz said in a statement.

PHOTO CREDIT: MARIE WHITE

While enrollment has been an issue, interim school director and social work professor Janet Okagbue-Reaves believes there are still many who want to pursue careers in health and human services, like social work.

"Social work is growing at a rate that's 7% higher than other occupations. So the jobs are out there. The jobs have always been out there because we live in a society where people are vulnerable. From whether you're working with an individual or a family or a community. What really attracts students to go to the field is that opportunity to practice systems theory," Okagbue-Reaves said. "A lot of our students, not all, but some have used the systems that they'll be working in or they've had contact with these systems. Some of them have suffered greatly and that can also drive them because they know how the system can work better."

The college has also had problems outside of student enrollment as the college has the second-highest decrease in faculty at 23.02% from 2019 to 2023.

Okagbue-Reaves points out that though the University expected this drop, it was higher than anticipated, partly due to the number of faculty who retired or left positions that have yet to be replaced.

"I mean we have wonderful part time lecturers who are seasoned veterans from the field who teach a lot of our classes. But there's something to be said about having tenured-faculty teaching. And we have quite a few faculty on grants and research projects, so we see more part time lecturers teaching but we really need tenured and tenured-track-faculty again, not that there's anything wrong with our lecturers," Okagbue-Reaves said. "They're wonderful, but they're just not at the meetings, they're not designing curriculum. You know, the leadership for the courses should come from faculty."

Having worked in the department for nearly two decades, Okagbue-Reaves said that enrollment tends to have its ups and downs and is hopeful this low will pass. Okagbue-Reaves, Kellman-Fritz, and other faculty members have met, created subcommittees, and devised plans dedicated to fixing the enrollment and faculty count.

"We are forging new partnerships with health systems, agencies, and community colleges, experiencing positive responses to these connections. My primary focus is to ensure that both undergraduate and graduate students graduate from EMU well-prepared for their respective fields. The ongoing recruitment of new faculty members has been a continuous effort over the past several years, a trend that will persist," Kellman-Fritz said in a statement.

Police Department Union votes no confidence in Chief Moore

CHARLES BOYKINS
NEWS REPORTER

Ypsilanti Police Department Union voted a no confidence in their current Police Chief Kirk Moore on Feb. 6. Chief Moore took office on April 20 of last year and is still expected to complete his four-year contract.

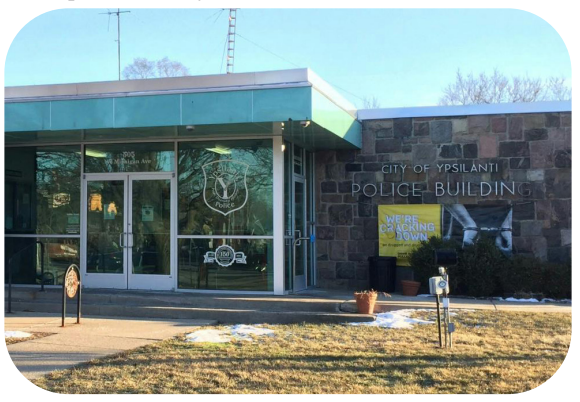


PHOTO CREDIT: EASTERN ECHO ARCHIVES

Moore is facing difficulties in the department, such as low staffing and low morale, that coincide with the vote in no confidence, and little support has been extended to the Police Chief.

Some of the difficulties during his short term have included the 13 total resignations from officers that have taken place, resistance to change, and how poor mental health standings of officers have also led to officers leaving the force.

According to MLive, concerning officers being resistant to change, Chief Moore wants to prioritize servant leadership and community service. Due to these implementations, former officers who did not want to partake resigned due to conflicting interests. Although the union cannot nor has the ability to remove the Chief through this vote, the responsibility of removal from the position of Chief falls upon the City Charter.

The Eastern Echo reached out to the police department, and the fellow officers have no comment on the vote at the moment. There are currently no ongoing investigations into the department about the vote of no confidence. The union has also chosen not to speak further on the vote.

Since the recent staffing struggles, the Ypsilanti Police Department has received help from other departments, such as the Department of Public Safety at EMU. When speaking to DPS during a ride-along in February, Lieutenant Nathaniel Stead talked about the effort to assist in Ypsilanti calls.

"There's no hiding that the Ypsilanti Police Department has had some staffing issues recently. We do help them out on occasion. You probably see during the ride along tonight, primarily Ypsilanti will send a police officer to handle the call and we'll be a backup unit," Lieutenant Stead said. "That's kind of just a mutual agreement that we have come to. The Ypsilanti community, the Eastern community, we are kind of all one. So Ypsi problems are kind of our problems. Our problems are kind of Ypsi problems. And we've got a really good working relationship with them. We're trying to get them through their hard time right now until they get their staffing levels back up."

In terms of the Ypsilanti Mayor Nicole Brown's support for the Chief, according to MLive, Brown said "However, it is paramount that we prioritize the greater good over individual interests, and stand firmly behind our Chief as he strives to enact meaningful reform and ensure the highest standards of professionalism within our police force."

Swoop's Food Pantry looks for community help during food drive

EMMA OWENS
COPY EDITOR

People can sign up to participate in the Stock Swoop's Shelves food drive; an opportunity to get engaged and make a difference in the lives of Eastern Michigan University students from March 4-22.

Swoop's is located in in 100 Pierce Hall inside John and Angie Sabo Swoop's Food Pantry Room. Groups on and off campus will assign a contact person, pick a theme, set a goal and start collecting items while working together to stock Swoop's Shelves. Several suggested themes and items to get started include: Taco Night, Pasta Night, breakfast, personal hygiene, baby items, snacks, school supplies, household items, condiments, reusable bags, gift cards, special dietary needs, or "Make Your Own Category."

EMU departments, student organizations, athletics teams, and more are encouraged and invited to participate in food drives. Swoop's can help to provide bins, flyers and a list of most needed items, but also allows the group who are holding the drive to establish their own way of running the event.

All non-expired and unopened food is accepted, as well as gently used and washed clothing. More information on what can and cannot be donated is available at this site.

Swoop's Pantry is student-led and runs solely on donations. Swoop's mission is to provide the EMU community with both food and non-food item assistance and additional resources to positively impact well-being and college success via empowerment, community, social justice, and sustainability.

"EMU students really appreciate the donations that allow easy access to nutritious food so they can focus on their education," Roya Herrle, Graduate Assistant at Swoop's Pantry, said.

PHOTO CREDIT: MARIE WHITE

Michigan 'Uncommitted' campaign gains two delegates from primary election

AMEERA SALMAN
CELLAR ROOTS EIC

An organization in Michigan has campaigned in an effort to make a statement to President Joe Biden about his response to the crisis in Gaza with Michigan's recent presidential primary.

Gaining over 100,000 "uncommitted" votes across Michigan, the effort saw its highest results in Washtenaw County and Wayne County. According to the Michigan Secretary of State, "uncommitted" earned 13.3% of the total vote in this year's primary. But, in Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor, the totals were much higher, with 30% of Ypsilanti voters choosing "uncommitted" and 21% of Ann Arbor voters doing the same.

Listen to Michigan, formed just weeks before Michigan's primary election, called on voters to select "uncommitted" on their democratic ballots.

Some Michigan elected officials endorsed the move to vote uncommitted, including House Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-12) and Dearborn Mayor Abdullah Hammoud. Both gained national attention for their criticism of the Biden Administration, with Tlaib being censured in the House of Representatives for her comments on Israel and Hammoud receiving backlash after an opinion piece was published criticizing the city of Dearborn.

Layla Elabed, campaign manager for Listen to Michigan, encouraged anyone going to the Democratic primary to vote uncommitted for the sake of Palestinian lives and a cease-fire in Gaza.

"If you believe in humanity, if you want a cease-fire, if you believe in saving human life, if you believe Palestinian life is valuable, then use this opportunity, do not sit at home," Elabed said. "Go out on February 27 … and send that message to Biden that we need a permanent cease-fire right now."

Now that the primary is over, Listen to Michigan aims to continue the pressure on the Biden Administration to take action in Gaza.

On March 2, American and Jordanian forces delivered humanitarian aid to Gaza, and on March 3, Vice President Kamala Harris called for an "immediate cease-fire in Gaza for the next six weeks."

What's the Move? March. 4 - 9

SARAI YANES
DIGITAL EDITOR

Pride Bracelet Making - March 4

It's Pride week and here is one way to celebrate! Alpha Sigma Tau and the LGBT Resource Center are partnering up to host a pride-filled beaded bracelet-making event. Join them from 6 to 8 p.m. in the Student Center, room 350.

Eagle Con - March 7

Eagle Con is an event where fandom is welcome. Attend dressed up in cosplay, and enjoy games, food, and a cosplay contest. Eagle Con is from 7 to 10 p.m. on the Student Center's third floor.

Pride Prom - March 8

This prom is a student dance with a theme of Mythical Wonders, sponsored by the LGBT Resource Center and Campus Life. The dance is from 8 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. in the McKenny Ballroom.

The Conjuring of Spring Artisan Market - March 9

Visit the Ypsilanti Freighthouse to shop for a variety of items from local vendors. There will also be music, candle making, tarot reading, and more.The market will run from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and admission is free.

For more events, visit our website.

Celebrate Black History with historic and educational day trips

SHANNON PARKER
NEWS REPORTER

Southwest Michigan is full of opportunities for those seeking to learn a little more about Black history in America. From museums to bead shops and outdoor installations, the day trips listed below are just a few of the places offering opportunities to study and appreciate Black and African American culture, experience and history. The following museums and cultural opportunities can all be visited and enjoyed in just a day's time from Ypsilanti and the Eastern Michigan University campus.

Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History

The Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History has been a crucial Detroit landmark for more than 50 years.

The museum's mission and vision statements focus on a need to preserve and celebrate the achievements and the adversity African Americans faced throughout history, with a goal of inspiring and unifying future generations.

The Wright houses several exhibits for the public to visit:

The Ruth E. Carter: Afrofuturism in Costume Design exhibit showcases the two-time Academy Award winning designer's costumes from iconic movies such as "Black Panther," "Malcolm X," and "Do The Right Thing."

The new Adreinne Waheed: The Audacity to Thrive exhibit explores what it truly means to be audacious and celebrates the ways Black communities have challenged conventional ways of thinking.

Other available exhibits include John E Dowell: Paths to Freedom and Honoring the Life and Legacy of Judge Damon J. Keith.

At 315 E. Warren Ave., the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday; and from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Thursdays. More information can be found at www.thewright.org.

Plowshares Theatre Company

The Plowshares Theatre Company produces shows that celebrate the history and passion of Black experiences throughout history. The company's mission statement explains that it is necessary to preserve these experiences to challenge minds and strengthen communities, and the company does so by engaging three core values: affirm, educate and inspire.

The company is kicking off its 2024 season with a production of "The House that Will Not Stand" by Marcus Gardley, which touches on the strengths and humanity of Black women. Set in early 19th-century New Orleans, "The House that Will Not Stand" is about widowed mother Beatrice and the challenges she faces raising her three daughters after the death of her husband. As Beatrice adapts to her new life as head of her household, a more ominous transfer of power is transpiring the region. The production runs through Feb. 26. Tickets can be purchased at the door.

The Plowshares Theatre Company is at 440 Burroughs St., Suite 525, in Detroit, Mich. For more information about current and future productions, visit www.plowsharestheatre.org.

William V. Banks Broadcast Museum

The William V. Banks Broadcast Museum is in the historical WGPR-TV62 studios, the first African American-owned and operated television station in the U.S.

Broadcast pioneer William V. Banks founded the station in 1975 amid mass skepticism and condemnation. Banks had a vision and despite criticism, succeeded in establishing a successful station that amplified Black voices, businesses and music. The William V. Banks Broadcast Museum opened in 2017 to showcase artifacts, oral histories, video archives, and other memorabilia.

The studio and museum are at 3146 E. Jefferson in Detroit and are open Saturdays as well as the first Friday of every month from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. More information about the studio and museum can be found at www.wgprmuseum.org.

Dabls MBAD African Bead Museum

The Dabls MBAD African Bead Museum is a creative space that celebrates African heritage through the cultural significance of beads and other African art styles.

Founded by Olayami Dabls, the museum consists of 18 outdoor installations known as the Sculpture Garden, which spans almost an entire city block in Detroit. Among these installations is the piece "Iron Teaching Rocks How to Rust," which uses iron, rocks, wood and mirrors as a metaphorical response to the 500-year-long strained relationship between African and European heritages.

According to the museum website, Dabls sought to educate others about the significance of African beads, masks and other art styles because for years their importance was misunderstood and even feared due to racism. Dabls began the project more than 16 years ago outside traditional museum guidelines and established a permanent celebration of African culture, tradition and heritage. Apart from the outdoor installations, the public can visit the African Bead Gallery, N'kisi House and the African Language Wall on the property.

The museum and bead shop are at 6559 Grand River Ave. in Detroit and are open from noon to 7 p.m. Monday through Saturday. More information about the museum and shop can be found at www.mbad.org.

Around The Community

PHOTO CREDIT: MADISON CANTRELL

ART BY DAJANIERE RICE DISPLAYED AT THE RIVERSIDE ARTS CENTER (RAC) . THE RAC HELD THE CLOSING RECEPTION FOR ITS BLACK HISTORY MONTH EXHIBITION ON FEB. 23

ART BY TYLEAR JEFFERSON DISPLAYED AT THE RIVERSIDE ARTS CENTER (RAC) . THE RAC HELD THE CLOSING RECEPTION FOR ITS BLACK HISTORY MONTH EXHIBITION ON FEB. 23

The Eastern Echo

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Soaring Eagles

Hosted by Sarai Yanes (left) with guest Zack VanNieuwnhze.

Eagletainment

Host Queso Tone (left) with guest Mackenzie Thompson (center) and host Julez DeShetler (right)

New Podcast Episodes Weekly!

Paige Marchant becomes MAC royalty

EMU women's track and field captures 2024 MAC Indoor Championship

BLAKE MCQUEARY
SPORTS EDITOR

Freshman Paige Marchant made history on Feb. 23 as she claimed three of Eastern Michigan University's eight title wins at the MAC Championships. The Eagles were crowned the 2024 indoor Mid-American Conference champions at the MAC Championships on Bob Parks Track inside Bowen Fieldhouse.

Marchant would notch 30 points on the day as she claimed wins in the 800m with a time of 2:10.26, the mile run in 4:49.67, and the 3,000m run in a meet-record time of 9:25.38. She became the fifth woman in MAC history to win the 800m and mile in the same meet and the first since 2000, while becoming only the second to add the 3,000m title to her total.

After her performance, Marchant was named the MAC Freshman of the Year and Most Valuable Performer.

The EMU women's team would finish with 144.5 points to be crowned champions as Kent State University finished in second place with a total of 85.5 points. Ball State University would finish in third place (61.5 points), Bowling Green State University would finish in fourth place (59.0 points), and Miami University would finish in fifth place (57.5 points).

As for the men's standings, Kent State University would take the MAC title with a total of 155 points while the Eagles finished in second place with 140 points. The University of Akron would finish in third with 128 points, while the University at Buffalo took fourth place with 93 points.

EMU's Saraiah Walkes (Manatee County, Fla.) and Callum Robinson (Goodrich, Ontario) would take wins in both the women's and men's 200m dash to complete the sweep. It marked the fifth time that the same school has captured both titles.

Walkes would also take a victory in the 60m dash with a time of 7.44 as she became the 11th woman in MAC history to accomplish wins in both. Alongside Walkes was Alyson Davis (Summerfield, N.C.) who finished in second place with a time of 7.45, which placed her tied at No. 9 in EMU's all-time history.

In the 4x400 relay, Walkes would join sophomore Tijana Japundzic (Belgrade, Serbia), senior Noriyah Johnson (Chania, Greece), and freshman Josephine Oloye (Iwaro-Oka, Nigeria) as they took home gold with a time of 3:44.74.

In the field, senior Kyra Buffen (Columbus, Ga.) was crowned the triple jump champion as she leaped to a 12.43m jump that ranked No. 8 in program history.

Freshman Claire Allen (Sandwich, Ill.) would also make noise in the field as she tossed a shotput out to 13.51m to finish fifth place and move her to No. 8 in EMU's all-time history. Miranda Caldwell (Plainfield, Ill.) would add herself to the list of gold as she took a victory in the weight throw.

On the men's squad, senior Yvan Lopes Ribeiro (Nice, France) totaled 18 points for the Eagles after finishing third place in the 60m hurdles, long jump, and triple jump. Robinson would add 14 points after his 200m title win and fourth-place finish in the 60m dash, while senior Formula Thompson (St. Catherine, Jamaica) also totaled 14 points with his long jump victory and fourth-place finish in triple jump.

In the field for men's, freshman Ryan Johnson (Springboro, Ohio) would capture gold in the weight throw.

In the heptathlon, freshman Samuel Jeffery (Fonthill, Ontario) finished in third place as he notched a personal best of 4,841 points. Jeffery would total 2,041 points in the final three events, ranking him 10th at EMU while his 8.74 hurdle time placed him eighth in the Eagles' heptathlon rankings.

Freshman Carson Doolittle (Findlay, Ohio) also participated in the heptathlon as he finished with a personal best of 4,454 points to finish sixth place. He notched a time of 2:48.91 in the 1,000m to move into No. 3 all-time.

The Eagles have now captured back-to-back MAC indoor titles after winning its ninth title on Saturday. EMU has now won titles in 1997, 2000, 2011, 2015, 2016, 2020, 2023, and 2024.

With the women's gold victory on Saturday, the title stands as the 93rd MAC championship in program history.

Next up, the Eagles now wait until next week for the list of qualifiers for the 2024 NCAA Indoor Track and Field Championships in Boston, Mass., on March 8-9. If no member of the EMU teams qualifies, the indoor season will officially come to an end as the outdoor season will begin in Orlando, Fla., on March 15-16 at the Black and Gold Invitational hosted by the University of Central Florida (UCF).

PHOTO CREDIT: EMU ATHLETICS

EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY DISTANCE RUNNER PAIGE MARCHANT CROSSES THE FINISH LINE FOR THE EAGLES.

EMU men's hoops falls to Miami on Senior Day, 52-37; Eagles eliminated from MAC Tournament contention

BLAKE MCQUEARY
SPORTS EDITOR

Senior Day on Saturday afternoon was spoiled for the Eastern Michigan University men's basketball team as the Redhawks of Miami (OH) University flew inside the George Gervin GameAbove Center and handed the Eagles their 17th loss of the season, 52-37.

EMU honored Andrew Wells (East Lansing, Mich.) and Tyson Acuff (Detroit, Mich.) along with student managers Evan Johnson, Sam Malcolm, and Bryson Wiliams for their contributions to the program as part of the Senior Day Ceremony.

Junior forward Jalin Billingsley (Cleveland, Ohio) led the way for the Eagles, finishing the game with a double-double as he notched 13 points and 10 rebounds, which marked the first double-double of the Ohio native's career.

It was a game of catchup for the Eagles from the jump as the Redhawks produced a 15-4 lead after a 10-0 run with 12 minutes left in the first half. The Eagles would then go on a run of their own and cut the deficit, 17-13, but Miami would continue to ball and enter the half with a 22-17 advantage.

The Redhawks would come out of the break on a mission as they went on a 15-4 run to extend the lead to 37-21 with a little over 12 minutes left to play. The Eagles would struggle to fight back as it was all Miami the rest of the way to force an EMU loss, 52-37.

Entering the matchup, EMU compiled an 11-1 record when holding its opponent to 71 points or less. It marks the first loss while doing so since the Eagles' 71-54 loss to no other than Miami, on Jan. 13.

Both teams would struggle shooting throughout the matchup as EMU went 16-for-50 (32%) from the field and 3-for-19 (15.8%) from three-point range, meanwhile the Redhawks would go 21-for-57 (36.8%) from the field and 5-for-24 (20.8%) from beyond-the-arc.

The difference maker would be the defensive presence from Miami as they forced the Eagles to turn the ball over 17 times, totaling 13 steals.

The Eagles now fall to 12-17 overall on the season and 5-11 in Mid-American Conference play while Miami improved to 15-14 overall and 9-7 throughout the conference.

With the loss and a win from Kent State University against Central Michigan University, the Eagles have officially been eliminated from MAC Tournament contention.

Next up, the Eagles will travel to Akron, Ohio, for a matchup with the MAC's top-ranked University of Akron on Tuesday, March 5. Tipoff for that game is scheduled for 7 p.m. and will be streamed on ESPN+.

EMU women's basketball loses fifth consecutive to Ball State

BLAKE MCQUEARY
SPORTS EDITOR

It wasn't a pretty Saturday afternoon in Indiana for the Eastern Michigan University women's basketball team as Ball State University dominated to a 75-47 win on March 2, to hand the Eagles their fifth consecutive loss.

Junior guard Lachelle Austin led the Eagles offensively as she finished with 14 points, while senior forward Kennedi Myles (Cincinnati, Ohio) added 11 points and eight rebounds.

EMU's junior center Tayra Eke (Madrid, Spain) is closing in on a milestone as she hauled in nine rebounds on Saturday. Eke now sits just 12 rebounds away from a career total of 500.

The Eagles fell behind from the jump as Ball State ran out to a 15-9 advantage to end the first quarter. The second quarter was the same story as the first with Ball State improving their lead to 30-20 to enter halftime.

The second half was when Ball State started to put things out of reach for the Eagles as they totaled 45 second-half points en route to their 75-47 victory.

Ball State shot the ball quite efficiently as they went 26-for-59 (44.1%) from the field while the Eagles struggled, shooting 16-for-51 (31.4%). EMU would find success at the charity stripe as they shot 12-for-12 (100%) at the line.

EMU would struggle to find an offensive rhythm as the Cardinals' defense was suffocating for the Eagles, forcing 24 total turnovers and converting those into 25 points.

Another win for Ball State on the day was their domination in the paint as they outscored the Eagles on points in the paint, 40-22.

The Eagles now sit at 6-21 overall on the season and 2-14 in Mid-American Conference play while Ball State improves to 25-4 on the year and 14-2 through conference play.

Next up, the EMU women's basketball squad will travel to Toledo, Ohio, to take on the University of Toledo, which sits atop the MAC rankings, on Wednesday, March 6. Tipoff for that game is scheduled for 7 p.m. and will be streamed on ESPN+.

PHOTO CREDIT: MADISON CANTRELL

MYLES, #44. EMU WOMEN'S BASKETBALL VS. KENT STATE IN PINK-OUT GAME ON FEB. 28 AT THE GEORGE GERVIN GAMEABOVE CENTER.

EKE, #32. EMU WOMEN'S BASKETBALL VS. KENT STATE IN PINK-OUT GAME ON FEB. 28 AT THE GEORGE GERVIN GAMEABOVE CENTER.

EMU WOMEN'S BASKETBALL TEAM WARMS UP TO VERSE KENT STATE IN A PINK-OUT GAME ON FEB. 28 AT THE GEORGE GERVIN GAMEABOVE CENTER.

AUSTIN, #11. EMU WOMEN'S BASKETBALL VS. KENT STATE IN PINK-OUT GAME ON FEB. 28 AT THE GEORGE GERVIN GAMEABOVE CENTER.

Eagle Sports Tips and Tales

BLAKE MCQUEARY
SPORTS EDITOR

Mid-American Conference adds UMass as full member

The University of Massachusetts was unanimously voted into the Mid-American Conference (MAC) as a full member for all sports by the MAC's Council of Presidents, as they announced on Thursday, Feb. 29. The move will be effective in 2025-26 and will improve the conference's membership to 13 institutions.

UMass will compete in the MAC in baseball, field hockey, football, men's & women's basketball, men's & women's cross country, men's & women's indoor/outdoor track and field, softball, women's lacrosse, women's soccer, men's & women's swimming and women's tennis.

The conference isn't anything new to the Minuteman, as they originally joined the MAC in 2012 as a football only affiliate, until they decided to become independent in 2015.

There will be a press conference held with MAC Commissioner Jon Steinbrecher, UMass Chancellor Javier A. Reyes and UMass Director of Athletics Ryan Bamford. It will be held at 11 a.m. on Thursday, March 7, and will be live streamed on UMassAthletics.com, ESPN+, and on the Massachusetts Athletics YouTube page.

EMU volleyball officially announces 2024 spring schedule

The Eastern Michigan University women's volleyball program's 2024 spring schedule is officially here, as head coach Kevin Foeman announced on Friday, March 1.

The Eagles are now fully focused to ramp up their spring season after concluding the fall season with an overall record of 5-25 while posting a 3-15 conference record.

The 2024 spring schedule will include the Green and White hitting the road for four exhibition matches. To set things off, the Eagles will head to East Lansing, Mich., on March 29, for a matchup with Michigan State University at 6 p.m.

Next, EMU will travel to Dayton, Ohio, on April 6, as they take on the Raiders of Wright State University. That matchup is listed as a tournament event with opponents, dates, and times being announced at a later date.

The Eagles will then face off against intrastate and MAC rival Central Michigan University in Mount Pleasant, Mich., with times to be announced.

To end the spring slate, EMU will return to Washtenaw County on April 17, as they head down the road for a battle against the University of Michigan Wolverines.

Buck Smith named Co-Diving Coach of the Year as Eagles place sixth at MAC Championships

The Eastern Michigan University swimming and diving team competed at the 2024 MAC Championships as they placed sixth after a four-day series at the OU Aquatic Center on the campus of Ohio University.

The University of Akron would take the crown as they finished in first place with 812.5 points. In second place was Miami University (652.5), third place was Ohio University (583), fourth place was held by the University at Buffalo (442), and Ball State University finished in fifth place.

In the individual finals, Abby Szadorski (Oswego, Ill.) finished the 200y breaststroke with a time of 2:17.66 as she finished in 10th place. Just behind Szadorski was Taylor Harris (Tiffin, Ohio) as she finished in 11th place with a time of 2:17.71.

Kierstin Russell (Clinton, Mich.) would compete in the 200y backstroke finals where she placed 11th with a time of 1:59.43.

Katarina Pastar (Vienna, Austria) would close out the individual performances for the Eagles as she took part in the 200y butterfly finals finishing with a time of 2:04.93 to place 14th.

Marlee Christie (Seminole, Fla.), Lucy Noble (Flagler Beach, Fla.), Emma Littrell (Taylor Mill, Ky.) and Russell competed in the 400y freestyle relay as they finished in sixth place with a time of 3:24.77, marking a season-best for the Eagles.

To wrap things up in the three meter diving A-final, Rebekah Knapp (Mesa, Ariz.) would finish in second place to mark EMU's highest finish throughout the four day event.

EMU's head diving coach Buck Smith would take home his 25th MAC Co-Diving Coach of the Year award.

Next up, Eagle swimmers will now await who will be selected to compete at the 2024 College Swimming and Diving Coaches Association of America (CSCAA) National Invitational Championships on March 14-16. Meanwhile, EMU divers will compete at the 2024 Zone C Diving Championships on March 14-16, in Louisville, Ky.

Check out weekly sports recaps and features on our website!

Review: 'Avatar: The Last Airbender' is a lazy rehash of a beloved cartoon

FRANK REMSKI
COLUMNIST

Beloved Nickelodeon cartoon "Avatar: The Last Airbender" has received its second attempt at a live action adaptation thanks to Netflix.

This new series shares the same title and premise as the original which aired in 2005 and ran for three seasons. Set in a fantasy world, it follows the adventures of Aang, the Avatar, a being capable of magically manipulating the elements of water, earth, air, and fire. He must learn to master all four elements in order to defeat the imperialist Fire Nation.

The show stars Gordon Cormier as Aang, Kiawentiio as Katara, Ian Ousley as Sokka, and Dallas Liu as Prince Zuko.

This is the second live adaptation of "Avatar: The Last Airbender." The first one was a film titled "The Last Airbender" released in 2010. It was universally panned by critics and fans.

Highs

The show rights the wrongs of "The Last Airbender" casting. The movie casted white actors despite the world being based on Asian and Native American cultures. The show does better with racially appropriate casting.

The young cast are generally good actors. Their choices for their delivery ring truer to their characters' souls than the actual writing. In particular, Cormier perfectly captures the spirited, youthful Aang and Liu plays an angry and tragic Zuko.

A few side characters get more backstory and depth. Specifically, Monk Gyatso and Zuko's crew are provided backstories that enrich their roles. Princess Yue has more personality, making her storyline more impactful.

The costumes stay true to the original series, brightly colored and detailed. This is another improvement from the movie, which had darker, muted colored costumes.

Lows

The first season of the cartoon had twenty episodes while the live adaptation has only eight. Stuffing in a lot of material from the original series in a short amount of time, it has no room to breathe or time to properly set up plot and character, making twists and relationships unearned.

The live action series lacks the subtlety and complexity of the cartoon. It spends far too much time with monologues explaining plot points and world building, relying more on telling the audience the story instead of showing it.

Much of the cartoon's humor has been taken out and replaced with nothing, leading to originally comedic characters becoming hollow, bland shadows of themselves such as Sokka and Uncle Iroh.

The humor is not the only disastrous removal. Many of the complex themes are toned down or done haphazardly. For example, the misogyny is toned down, which weakens the feminist messages and takes away much of Katara's righteous anger, making her less interesting as a character despite, Kiawentiio playing her well. Another example is how the new series opens with the genocide of the Air Nomads, focusing on the violence, but spending less time on Aang's grief and love for his lost people.

Visually, the show is an eyesore. Prioritizing the color of the cartoon for the costumes, but not the background, plus a heavy use of computer-generated imagery leads to the visuals clashing. Though they are clearly meant to emulate the cartoon, the cartoon's art style allowed it to better execute the visuals. The shows attempts at recreating it loses the beauty in translation.

Verdict

It is unclear who this new series is for. It spends too much time over-explaining the story for fans of the cartoon, but its lack of timing leaves little context for new fans to enjoy it. Despite the new series being aimed for a more mature audience than the cartoon, the cartoon is far more complex, impactful, and overall entertaining.

The entire first season is available to watch on Netflix. The cartoon is also currently available on Netflix.

Rating: 4 out of 10 stars.

Frank Remski is a film and theater reviewer for the Eastern Echo. He is majoring in media studies and journalism and minoring in public relations. He has worked for The Echo since the summer of 2023 and has written both news stories and opinion pieces.

Check out more reviews of new movies and music on the Echo website!

Review: 'Drive-Away Dolls' fails on every front

MARIE WHITE
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

This film is one that lacks a plot that scratches deeper than surface level. With a great cast of actors, the movie had the potential to be great but instead comes off as unfunny and offensive. Not only is the style of film completely different than the editing in the trailer, but it sells the film as something entirely different than what it is, while simultaneously showing off the whole movie in the two minute trailer.

Synopsis

Two friends embark on a spontaneous road trip to Tallahassee, Fla., using a drive-away car service. Things go awry when the girls realize they are being hunted by a group of criminals for things they didn't mean to take with them in their drive-away car.

Starring Geraldine Viswanathan as Marian, Margaret Qualley as Jamie, Beanie Feldstein as Sukie, with cameos from Matt Damon, Pedro Pascal, and Miley Cyrus.

Highs

Viswanathan's character is one of the few redeeming qualities of the film. Marian is a relatable shy character who reads books about love, and wants something more (and is the only likable character in the entire film). Viswanathan's quirks, mannerisms and personality sell the role, despite the lackluster script

Lows

The biggest crime in this film is how lesbian sexuality is portrayed throughout. Thinking this film would be a good representation of a queer relationship dynamic, when it's alluded to in the trailer as such, it does the absolute opposite and makes the movie almost unbearable at parts. I felt like I was watching how men think lesbian women act versus how they actually act. The whole plot of the movie only works because they're gay women, and it's not even a good plot for that, it's actually demeaning. This film feels written by a boy who doesn't understand how lesbian relationships work, and it feels made for the straight audience, not queer. Plastered phallic objects litter the movie for no real purpose at all, other than to sell the point of the paper thin plot that feels held together by pick up sticks.

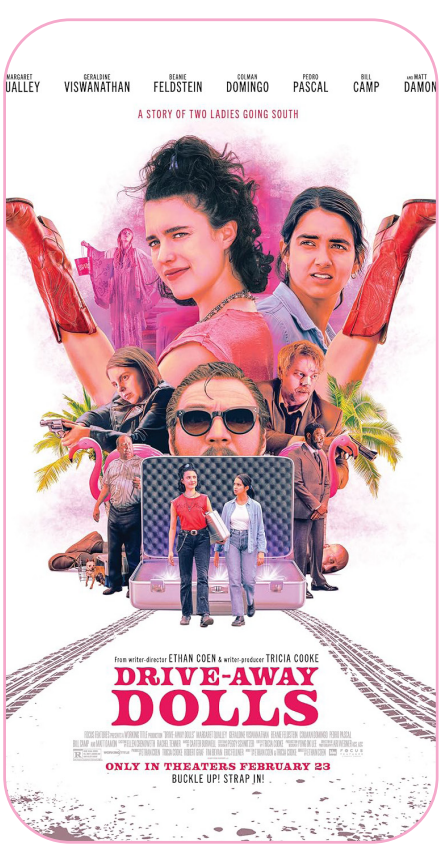
Qualley's character, Jamie, fails to excite at all. Qualley does a good job in other acting roles but in this film sports an unbearable, uncommon southern accent that distracts throughout the entire film. The chemistry between the two main characters feels stagnant and forced at points. Overall, Jamie comes off as distracting, and disconnected from the plot.

Transitions feel disjointed throughout the film. We are met by psychedelic transitions and theming, but only in transitions until our conclusion. For such a big act of making a transition to bright colors, and putting yourself into the 70s type feel, it distracts from the plot because of the lack of context for these transitions. These transitions are used throughout the film as a foreshadowing for the ending, but being so disjointed from how the rest of the film is made just makes them difficult to like.

Verdict

While the film's length is only an hour and 24 minutes long, it feels like a whole three hour production with how much this movie drags. I wanted to love this movie, but with terrible low ball humor, horrible representation and a paper thin plot line, this movie has little to no watch factor.

I give "Drive-Away Dolls" a 1.5 out of 10.



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Review: 'Mea Culpa' reveals intriguing plot twists

MARIAM FAKHREDDINE
COLUMNIST

Tyler Perry's film "Mea Culpa" is a legal thriller that shares similarities to his previous feature film "A Fall from Grace." Kelly Rowland, Trevante Rhodes, and Sean Sagar star in this movie. This movie features a love triangle cliché in a sense; it's dramatic and has the suspenseful element of a murder case.

Highs

Rowland's portrayal of Mea, the strong character, and her willingness to pursue a difficult murder case over the opinions of her husband and his family made for an outstanding performance. Even when Zyair makes things different for her, she still can keep it secure and follow the rules. Her best friend and go-to private investigator Jimmy (Ron Reaco Lee) is another high; he assists her in cracking this murder case. He brings a sense of humor to the movie and plays a distinctive role because he only has her best interests at heart.

Additionally, images from the murder site helped to piece this case together. Mea was in a lot of difficulty because it was a hard case with strong evidence. The instances where Jimmy was trying to get Zyair to crack were particularly funny as he was being interrogated. There were moments of tension that truly made the viewer wonder if Zyair was innocent or not.

Lows

Mea's spouse Kal was a mama's boy and a weak character, making him the low point of the film. Even when his mother openly despised Mea in front of his entire family, he would never defend her. However, because Mea was a defense lawyer and his brother Ray (Nick Sagar) was a prosecutor, who was equally as bad, he would also attack her. In particular, he served as the prosecutor in the Zyair murder case that she took on. Ray made the same passive-aggressive remarks about Mea that his mother Azalia did, which demonstrated how awful his attitude toward Mea was. I would get annoyed by these specific instances because her husband fails to protect her.

Verdict

There were intriguing plot twists in this film that helped to tie it all together, especially towards the end where the main action happens.

Rating: 6.5 out of 10.

Mariam Fakhreddine is a film and theater reviewer for The Eastern Echo. She has worked as a news and features reporter for The Echo for two years.

Read the full review and more on easternecho.com

Review: Living in Fiction makes us fall more in love with a political anthem

KASPER MIELKE
COLUMNIST

What would the world be if it weren't for metal? Something rather boring, that's what. Living in Fiction, a metal cover band, took this as a challenge and took one of the most iconic alternative songs and flipped it on its head.

Background

The 1975 is an alternative rock band that has been active since early 2010. "Love It If We Made It" is a political piece critiquing the many things wrong with the world. Living in Fiction is a metal band that has done many covers of popular songs such as "Love Me Like You Do" by Ellie Goulding. This time is a bit different since it is something that is marginally closer to the sound of their music.

Did they do it justice?

"Love It If We Made It" is a timely piece for the year 2018 and one might think that renewing it six years later was going to be irrelevant. However, a lot of the topics discussed can still be recognized in 2024. The metal version just emphasizes what is being talked about.

One of the most impressive things about this song is that it still manages to keep the same mood. Sometimes when a metal band does a spin on popular music they completely change the color. Thankfully, Living in Fiction did not do that when adding rough vocals to the mix. It is still enjoyable, and maybe even more enjoyable to the person who may not love music like The 1975's.

Verdict

It is easy to say that this song thrives under the sound of metal. This cover can compete with the original.

Kasper Mielke is a music reviewer for the Eastern Echo. He is a women and gender studies major with a minor in creative writing. He has worked for The Echo since the summer of 2022 and has stuck to writing music reviews.

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